

all the heat and light, I never doubted that Harry was doing what he earnestly believed was right for Nevada and for the Nation.

Elaine and I were grateful to enjoy a joint friendship with Harry and Landra, the light of Harry's life, his beloved high school sweetheart. The Senate's thoughts and prayers continue to be with her and the entire Reid family.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, on a completely different matter, as the Senate begins this new year and new session, millions of Americans are yet again having life disrupted by a new and surging variant of the coronavirus. Thus far, there is cause for optimism. The rapidly spreading Omicron variant seems to cause milder disease than previous iterations. By now, a huge portion of our population has some immunity through our remarkable safe and effective vaccines or through prior exposure, and our healthcare providers know much more today than they did 2 years ago.

Unfortunately, the last few weeks have also exposed big gaps between the Biden administration's promises and the reality under their leadership. In 2020, then-Candidate Biden promised he would "shut down the virus." That clearly has not happened. Back when the virus had killed 220,000 Americans, then-Candidate Biden said that "anyone who is responsible for that many deaths should not remain as President of the United States." Now almost four times that many people have died.

Look, nobody is solely blaming this administration for this mutating virus, but nobody forced Democrats to campaign on those promises and attacks. They chose to do that, but they haven't governed accordingly.

It has been nearly a year since President Biden inherited three vaccines and a distribution operation that was already putting a million shots in a million arms every day. That was before this administration took office. What new solutions do Democrats have to show for a full year in power? Where is their 2021 equivalent to our 2020's Operation Warp Speed? What did they produce in 11 months besides angry speeches about the vaccines they inherited? Why does the pandemic in January 2022 feel so eerily similar to the pandemic in January of 2021, except that this administration happened to get lucky with an apparently less-dangerous variant?

After a year of this administration, families are still having trouble tracking down testing for work, school, travel, or even peace of mind. This administration has limited important treatments. They dragged their heels on promising innovations. They have been inexplicably slow to disburse relief funds for hospitals and providers that Congress set aside ages ago. They have used odd, alienating rhetoric around the vaccines they inherited.

And remember, last spring when our Democratic colleagues spent \$1.9 tril-

lion on a supposedly COVID-related spending bill, only 9 percent of it went to the actual fight against COVID-19—just 9 percent of the \$1.9 trillion authorized last March.

So this all-Democrat government spent its first year distracted, and the country is feeling the consequences.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. President, on a related matter, fortunately for the country, before Christmas, one of those far-left distractions was dealt a setback. The Democrats' wasteful spending last spring helped ignite the worst inflation in 40 years, but our colleagues spent the rest of 2021 trying to assemble yet another even bigger, even more reckless tax-and-spending spree. Their reaction to rising prices and family hardships their policies caused was to try to inflate their way out of inflation.

The experts say that when you strip away the budget gimmick, their proposal would cost almost \$5 trillion. And all of that reckless borrowing and money-printing was for far-left policies that would hurt American families and actually help China.

The supposedly "green" subsidies would just dump money in China-dominated supply chains. America takes on massive debt to "Build Back Beijing."

The childcare plan was actually an unworkable and discriminatory toddler takeover that would drive up daycare costs and let woke bureaucrats drive out faith-based providers. They even wanted to distort American parents' child tax credit and turn it into an old-school cash welfare program with no work requirements at all—now, all of this paired with historic, crushing tax hikes and trillions more dollars to make inflation even worse.

It was a merrier Christmas for American families because this awful bill was actually put aside. Working Americans need it to actually stay on the shelf.

VOTING

Mr. President, on one final matter, when our colleagues' reckless taxing-and-spending spree began to falter, some Democrats started saying a totally different issue was actually really their top priority. If they don't get to blow \$5 trillion on low-quality socialism, our colleagues are now demanding a consolation prize: breaking the Senate's rules in order to give themselves sweeping control over all 50 States' election laws.

This is what some of our colleagues want so desperately. This is what they have sought for years. Even as their pretexts and justifications kept shifting, the goal stayed consistent. Most Washington Democrats want to appoint themselves a nationwide board of elections on steroids, and they want to shatter the Senate's rules and traditions to make it happen.

After Democrats lost the White House in 2016, they said this takeover was necessary because our democracy was fundamentally broken. Now that they have won the White House, the

story has totally flipped. Now our democracy is in perfect shape, beyond reproach—except when States that Democrats don't control dare to pass mainstream voting laws.

The political left keeps pitching their big lie that mainstream State voting laws are somehow "Jim Crow 2.0" if the Governor who signs the bill happens to be a Republican. The left's big lie insults the intelligence of the American people. All the facts disprove it. In one of the States that triggered this meltdown, the new profiles mandated more days—more days—of early voting than many Democrat-run States provide today.

Our democracy is not in crisis. Repeating this rhetoric doesn't make it factual. The 2020 elections saw the highest turnout in more than 100 years. Only 33 percent of American adults think it is too hard for eligible voters to vote. A larger share actually think current rules aren't strict enough. This is fake—fake—hysteria ginned up by partisans, and our citizens actually know it. They figured it out. Last November, even in New York, the State's overwhelmingly Democratic voters rejected several left-wing ballot measures to change voting laws.

This big lie that democracy is dying because Democrats sometimes lose elections is a completely astro-turfed sense of crisis. The emperor has no clothes.

It is even more ironic that on this most sensitive subject—our democracy itself—some Senate Democrats want to drop a procedural nuclear bomb on the Senate itself to get their way. Our colleagues have no principled opposition to the filibuster—none at all. This is not about principle.

In 2020 alone, Senate Democrats used the filibuster repeatedly to block the CARES Act, delaying help at the start of the pandemic. They used it to kill Senator TIM SCOTT's police reform bill.

In 2017, 32 Senate Democrats, including then-Senator HARRIS, signed an open letter insisting the legislative filibuster should not change. A few years before that, the current Democratic leader said this about the prospect of nuking the filibuster. This is from the current Democratic leader:

The ideologues in the Senate want to turn what the Founding Fathers called the "cooling saucer of democracy" into the rubberstamp of dictatorship.

He went on:

They believe if you get 51 percent of the vote, there should be one party rule.

He went on:

They want to make this country into a banana republic where if you don't get your way, you change the rules.

He went on:

It will be a doomsday for democracy if we do.

That is the Senate Democratic leader on the possibility of nuking the Senate. Some people's tunes change when they happen to be in the majority versus the minority, but some Senators

mean what they say. There are Senators on both sides of the aisle who have had the courage to stand up for these important rules when we have been in the minority and when we have been in the majority. I don't have to remind the Senate that the previous President frequently harangued me to nuke the Senate. On every occasion, I had a one-word answer: No. No.

There are Senators on both sides who understand that any supposedly limited "carve-out" would bring the whole house crashing down. There are Senators on both sides who understand that the entirety of Federal law shouldn't go radically boomeranging back and forth every time the Senate narrowly changes hands.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior legislative assistant clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING DR. JERALD F. COMBS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, in eastern Kentucky, one man has been at the center of efforts to expand eye care for nearly 40 years. Dr. Jerald Combs, who passed away last month, played an instrumental role in modernizing and extending access to optometric care across Kentucky's Appalachian region. Today, I recognize Dr. Combs as an outstanding Kentuckian whose work made a vast impact on the lives of his patients.

When Dr. Combs began his practice in Martin, KY, in 1983, optometry in eastern Kentucky was an underdeveloped practice. Many residents lacked access to the eye care they needed, leaving far too many without good vision. Dr. Combs made it his mission to change that status quo and improved many lives in the process. His clinic served the entire eastern Kentucky region, attracting patients from far and wide who needed his care.

Perhaps Dr. Combs' greatest legacy will be his efforts to increase optometry training opportunities in his community. Because of his work in this area, the University of Pikeville named their college of optometry in his honor. The school's Jerald F. Combs Endowed

Scholarship gives students of all backgrounds the ability to study the subject, providing expertise to those who will stay in eastern Kentucky and help develop the field further.

Throughout his life, Dr. Combs was committed to serving his community and our Commonwealth and earned many awards for his efforts. The Kentucky Optometric Association lavished him with praise, granting him both their Optometrist of the Year Award and Distinguished Service Award twice. He also served as president and a board member of the association for many years. Outside of optometry, Dr. Combs helped his community through the Knott County Youth Foundation, the Knott County Little League, the Kiwanis Club, and the Hazard Lions Club. He served on the University of Pikeville Board of Trustees, steering the school to success.

I knew Dr. Combs personally and was saddened to learn of his passing last month. Few Kentuckians play as big or instrumental of a role in their community as he did. While we all mourn his loss, we can also be confident that his legacy, expanded access to eye care among Kentucky's most vulnerable communities, will last for many years into the future. I would like to express my personal gratitude for Dr. Combs' decades of service to the Commonwealth and encourage my Senate colleagues to join me in sharing condolences with the family, friends, and colleagues.

RECOGNIZING OWENSBORO, THE "BLUEGRASS CAPITAL OF THE WORLD"

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, few Kentucky creations have had as much impact on American culture as Bluegrass music. It is the spring from which all other country music flows and one of our State's most world-renowned exports. Owensboro, KY, has played an important role in maintaining and promoting Bluegrass history, style, and heritage and, in recognition of that work, was recently named the Bluegrass Capital of the World. Today, I honor Owensboro for earning this title and helping preserve Kentucky's proud Bluegrass culture.

Owensboro's deep connection to Bluegrass music dates back to the genre's earliest days. Bill Monroe, widely recognized as the "Father of Bluegrass", was born just outside Owensboro in Ohio County, KY. His musical group, the Blue Grass Boys, adapted the unique style of music they found in Scotch-Irish communities in Kentucky's Appalachian foothills and popularized it for a mainstream audience. Listeners, entranced by Blue Grass Boys' soaring melodies, jaunty rhythm, and homespun style, started a craze for Bluegrass music that brought national fame to generations of Kentucky artists.

Owensboro's leaders have recognized their unique role in Bluegrass history

and sought to capitalize on that connection. City officials ushered in the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Museum in downtown Owensboro in 1991, inviting both tourists and locals to learn about and enjoy Bluegrass history. The city's annual "River of Music Party", or ROMP, welcomes more than 20,000 visitors to the banks of the Ohio River to celebrate Bluegrass artists and help sustain this proud Kentucky tradition. And just recently, Owensboro Mayor Tom Watson signed the official proclamation naming his city the Bluegrass Capital of the World, cementing Owensboro's important place in Bluegrass history.

Owensboro's leaders have also initiated a strong campaign to educate and popularize Bluegrass among the next generation of Kentuckians. The Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Museum features rotating exhibits highlighting key parts of Bluegrass history and hosts artists that promote the genre. The museum offers lessons in musical instruments like the mandolin, banjo, and fiddle, helping ensure the survival of their unique sounds and style. The museum's Bluegrass in the Schools program has introduced Bluegrass music to nearly 10,000 elementary students, including in 24 Owensboro-area schools, connecting young Kentuckians with their State's culture and history.

Bluegrass music is the soundtrack of Kentucky. From the first pluck of the banjo, strum of the guitar, or drone of the fiddle, the genre is immediately recognizable. Owensboro's leaders have done incredible, extensive work to preserve and promote this unique Kentucky music and are incredibly deserving of their city's recent designation as Bluegrass Capital of the World.

Mr. President, the Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer highlighted the city's new title in a recent article. I ask unanimous consent the article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer,
Nov. 24, 2021]

BLUEGRASS CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

The City of Owensboro has officially been designated the "Bluegrass Capital of the World" after more than a year of effort by the city and the Bluegrass Hall of Fame and Museum.

Mayor Tom Watson officially signed the proclamation permanently linking Owensboro and bluegrass music during a Nov. 12 ceremony at the Bluegrass Hall of Fame and Museum.

"About 15 months ago we started talking about this idea, and it has taken a little while to get it to this point, but we are here today to declare the City of Owensboro as the Bluegrass Music Capital of the World," Watson said during the event.

Watson called Chris Joslin, museum executive director, to the stage and asked him to turn around so he could officially sign the proclamation on his back, telling him, "a lot of this is going to be on your back."

"The idea is to create a sustainable structure and utilize our bluegrass music presence to build out economic development opportunities and increase tourism," Watson said.